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ABSTRACT

Counseling psychologists are in ideal positions to address issues pertinent to black college students, particularly via empirical research study and advocacy. The first step towards maximizing benefit to black college students is to respond to their need for personal and community-wide intervention. It is necessary to collaborate with the racial/ethnic community on matters of most urgency to these students. Ties with members of the campus community who are actively involved in research related to black student adjustment and/or attrition need to be generated. Enlisting the assistance of black graduate students in counseling psychology programs is another important way that counselors can provide benefit to the community. Every effort should be made to make the experimental counseling process as meaningful and positive as possible to all students, if not in the actual experiment, then in the debriefing. Allowing black students to explore personal issues may be particularly valuable. It is imperative that feedback be verbalized about research to black students and that these students be provided with ample opportunity to discuss their questions or concerns. Researchers who practice with groups should establish weekly support groups for students in need of services. These strategies for providing benefit are useful only if research practices that unfairly characterize blacks are avoided. (ABL)

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Providing Benefit to Black College Students in Counseling Research

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Running Head: PROVIDING BENEFIT

Providing Benefit to Black College Students in Counseling Research

Parallel to the growth of an increasingly diverse society and an increasingly diverse population in need of mental health services, several review articles, chapters, and theoretical papers have emerged in recent years identifying strategies for improving counseling research with Black clients (e.g., Atkinson, 1983; Casas, 1984, 1985; Helms, 1984, 1986, 1989; Parham, 1989; Ponterotto, 1988) Based on these contributions, it is clear that the counseling profession needs to both broaden and refine the existing knowledge base by (1) employing more sophisticated research designs; (2) including research variables that attempt to better explain the complexity inherent in cross- and same-race counseling experiences; (3) replicating and/or reconceptualing past research findings related to process and outcome to extend our understanding of Black personality and behaviors (perhaps by employing more qualitative research designs); and (4) expanding upon the existing racial identity development research by validating and creating new premises that serve to better explain the development of Blacks from an Africentric focus. All in all, investigators who pursue these areas of research face an exciting challenge: to contribute to the upward spiralling growth in relevant multicultural research and to the improvement of future psychological services for Black clients.

Relative to these helpful and well-identified research recommendations, virtually absent are pragmatic recommendations

or strategies for addressing the needs of Blacks who take part in counseling research. Yet, the need to provide benefit to Black participants in counseling research appears critical to ethical research practice. Researchers need to recognize that the communities from which they draw Black participants are directly or indirectly plagued with an onslaught of problems that continue to jeopardize the hope for a racially equal society. Such problems as rising unemployment rates, disproportionate representation of Black families in low socioeconomic status levels, health-related concerns, the increasing incidence of gang violence and teenage pregnancy and school attrition have signaled to many Black Americans that the gains accomplished in the 1960s and 1970s are all-too-quickly fading and that more forceful efforts are needed to empower the community.

In contrast to these immediate and urgent demands of the Black community, our multicultural research efforts tend to focus primarily on providing benefit to future client samples. Personally valuable to us as well as to our professional colleagues is the tedious process of research, that process of acquiring information that will lead to the desired outcome: better services for diverse clients. However, it is quite likely that the urgent demands of the Black community requires that we combine our futuristic, long-range goals with immediate strategies for responding to the community's needs. As long as these demands continue to be pressing, members of the Black community may not perceive our research efforts as relevant as our efforts toward contributing to the "cause." For these reasons, the practice of soliciting the participation of Blacks without providing

benefit to the community reflects an unethical practice that results in a disservice to our subjects and, quite likely, minimal validation of our eventual findings.

While the problems facing all Black communities are pervasive, this article will address the needs of Black students attending predominantly White institutions and the strategies researchers can adopt in responding to the needs of these students. I have chosen Black students at predominantly White institutions for two reasons: (1) this population is used considerably in counseling research and (2) this population may be vulnerable to unique challenges that are well within the grasps of counseling professionals employed in college and university settings.

Black students at predominantly White institutions face challenges within the environment that demand urgent attention. Studies suggest that Black students attending predominantly White institutions Black students perceive greater racial tension and hostility in their environment (Wright, 1981), express lower levels of satisfaction with the institution (Allen, 1981; Gibbs, 1982), and greater levels of isolation (Fleming, 1984), and feel less identified with the institution (Allen, Bobo, & Fleuranges, 1984) than do White students. Black students may also be more likely than White students to experience feelings of alienation; moreover, these feelings of alienation may relate to attrition for Black students, but not for White students (Suen, 1983). Black students are also more likely to drop out of these schools than their White counterparts (Astin, 1977; Thomas, 1987). Recent reports of overt racist acts that are occurring on college campuses throughout the U.S. vividly bring home for Black

college students the vulnerable status of visible racial/ethnic group[1] people to the dominant culture and its institutions.

More related to our professional training, a study conducted by Fleming (1984) found that a broad sample of Black students attending predominantly White institutions did not achieve the same levels of intellectual or psychosocial development as a sample of students attending predominantly Black institutions. Consequently, some of these students will persist and graduate at these schools, yet not achieve levels of development that would be expected of college-age adults based on personality and student development theorists (e.g., Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1968).

As a result of the demands and related foci of the Black community, I believe that multicultural counseling researchers need to humanize the research experiences for Black individuals who participate in research by responding to their need for personal and community-wide intervention. In the foregoing discussion, I will present some strategies on how researchers can maximize benefit to Black students at predominantly White institutions ("give back") while simultaneously satisfying their experimental objectives. In providing strategies, my major premise is that through our philosophic lens and professional training, we as counseling psychologists are in ideal positions to address issues pertinent to Black college students, particularly via empirical research study and advocacy. In satisfying our experiemental objectives, I will demonstrate how efforts to respond systematically to the needs of our Black participants can enhance our research by increasing the likelihood of sincere rather than superficial responding, increasing

participation in future studies, achieving greater representation of Blacks across the racial identity levels (see Helms, 1989), and, ultimately, greater reliability and validity of the research. I will present examples of my own experiences using these strategies.

Giving Back: Planning and Recruitment

The first step toward maximizing benefit to Black college students by giving to the community is to collaborate with the racial/ethnic community on matters of most urgency to these students; this can be done on several levels. First, we need to generate ties with members of the campus community who are actively involved in research related to Black student adjustment and/or attrition. Ideally, such groups would be interdisciplinary teams that draw on the expertise and professional talents of a broad range of the campus' academic faculty and administrators, service providers. By combining these diverse, and respectively acknowledged talents, the campus can have in place an identified group that will continually examine factors related to adjustment and attrition, work with varied perspectives, and present findings and strategies to administrating bodies for implementing change in the environment. Such an effort is presently realized at the University of Maryland with the Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS).

From a professional standpoint, our input as members of these teams is extremely valuable. Not only do we concern ourselves with individual, psychological adjustment, but we do so within a person-environment interactive framework; consequently, behaviors are explained from the standpoint that the individual can develop optimally within his or her environment. Intriguingly, the more

prominent model for studying student attrition (Tinto, 1975) espouses that the lack of fit between the student and institution may contribute to an explanation of why a student leaves or stays at the institution; yet, few studies have investigated the likelihood that racial problems may contribute to problems related to Black students' achieving congruence. In fact, much of the research involving Black college students continues to perceive the "problem" as a function of the student rather than the interaction between student and a potentially racist and hostile environment. The focus is typically on the well-known factors related to achieving fit that, in some schools, Black students may be more likely to possess (non-college preparatory high schools, high school grade point averages). The continued use of these factors reflects the victim-blame perspetive that have typically caused Blacks to avoid social science research. Studies that examine noncognitive factors (examples) still fail to capture the complexity of the phenomena of poor adjustment and attrition and too often, these variables rely on victim-blame perspectives as well.

The counseling profession is also taking the necessary strides to consider the cultural frames of reference of persons of color to explain counseling behaviors, and this perspective-taking can certainly benefit the research in adjustment and attrition. With our knowledge of the development of racial consciousness we may also provide theoretical speculations on how some students survive through these environments whereas others may not. In my recent review of the literature on Black student/White campus attrition and

adjustment (Thompson, 1989), it was evident that remarkably few studies consider these seemingly relevant factors.

Enlisting the assistance of Black graduate students in counseling psychology programs is another important way that we can provide benefit the community. Black graduate students can offer insights to the research process in ways that contribute not only toward increased interest and competency among these students but encouraged involvement in the community. Graduate students who work closely with undergraduate students who serve as subjects or as co-experimenters can serve as effective role models for these students who may lack these models. In fact, in a recent study on stress and coping among Black students attending UCSB involving individual interviews, I found that the source causing the greatest amount of stress among these students was the lack of role models in this setting.

It would be crucial that these graduate student research assistants be inextricably tied to every phase of the research process as undergraduate students need to witness that these advanced level students are not just pawns in the process, but fully involved in the research from the planning stage to manuscript preparing stage. Increased exposure between Black graduate and undergraduate students may lead to collaborative efforts with additional research projects or perhaps with Black organizations. Such mentoring is vital for students at these campuses and the increased visibility of graduate students can offer college students the opportunities to know and learn from those who have "made it" through the academic

system. This type of contact may be particularly needed given the shortage of visible racial/ethnic group faculty on these campuses.

All of these recommendations have been exercised at UCSB and are beginning to show some effect in creating community, establishing rapport, and trust among students and gaining greater levels of participation in subsequent research. It is important to note that much of my effort to combine my interest in the Black community and in future counseling services, I try to integrate interviewing in studies. In this way, students are getting more "personal" attention regarding issues that concern them and provides a rich source of data that qualitative, ethnographic research can offer. Moreover, these interactions allow an opportunity for these students to receive direct referral to services for their problems.

Giving Back: Data Gathering

It is vital that we make every effort to make the experimental counseling process as meaningful and positive as possible to all students; if not in the actual experiment, then in the debriefing. In fact, I see much value in subjects having to participate in quasi-counseling experiences where they can freely discuss issues related to real problems that they are experiencing in their lives. With these efforts, subjects can benefit from the research by having subjects receiving help of the appropriate referrals based onthese real-life issues.

For Black students, evidence suggests that counseling services may not be utilized as frequently as with White students, despite a prevalence of problems that Black college students experience (Hughes, 1987). Consequently, allowing Black students to explore

personal issues in our research may be particularly valuable. As an illustration, I have required volunteers to discuss real issues related to alienation or isolation in quasi-counseling study, with the hope that students may provide information about issues on campus. Again, this data-gathering emphasis combines goals of conducting research and accumulating adjustment/attrition data.

Completion and Follow-up

I believe that it is imperative that we verbalize feedback about the research to Black students and provide these students with ample opportunity to discuss their questions or concerns. Using culturally sensitive counseling strategies, we may be able to identify problem areas that may otherwise go unrecognized or undirected to appropriate referral. As a part of a network comprised of competent, culturally sensitive practitioners, we can make referrals and educate these students about the counseling process and its benefits. Even more important, we are professionals who are especially apt at recognizing the needs of these students within the context of their environments. Again, we don't emphasis the victim-blame perspective.

I also urge those researchers who practice with groups to establish weekly support groups for students in need of these services. Problems and issues that emerge from the research (particularly during interviewing) can provide the stimulus for establishing these groups. To continue to promote student learning, these groups can ideally be co-lead with graduate students, interns, of other professional contacts, full-time counseling psychologists of color. In one study that I'll be conducting this fall, we actually will

identify participants who are interested in support groups for Black college women and organize these groups accordingly. To cater to the needs of all Black women, including differentiated racial identity attitudes, we will offer groups for Black women, as well as for Black and White women combined students perhaps combining issues related to raciams and sexism.

Conclusions

These strategies for providing benefit are useful only if we also ensure that research practices that unfairly characterize Blacks is avoided. Although the more extreme cases related to maltreatment of Black subjects in experimentation (see Gordon, 1973) have been emphasized, it is the more subtle, yet pervasive practices that continue to give researchers a bad name in the Black community and to foster feelings of mistrust. These research practices include the failure of investigators to account for intragroup differences, thereby perpetuating the myth of racial homogeneity; comparisons between Whites and Blacks where the characteristics or behaviors of Blacks are seen as deficiencies as opposed to appreciable differences; and the failure to account for the interaction of individual and systemic variables, and thusly adhering to "victim-blame" perspectives. In lieu of these practices, it is not surprising that some Blacks believe that researchers who want to elicit them as "subjects" do so only to serve their own interests and not the interest of the Black community. To reiterate, I implore researchers to plan, conceptualize, and derive implications related to findings that genuinely provide benefit to those populations to whom our findings will apply.

We need to start (or continue) to promote research programs that encourage student collaboration which further establishes positive, mentoring relationships. One excellent program of this type is the University of California's Graduate Research Mentorship Program (GRMP), where teams of one or two faculty members, two graduate students, and two to four undergraduate students work together to conduct a research study during the academic year. This program provides students with a unique opportunity for mentoring and academic skill-building. As advocates, we also need to be more visible in the community by acting as faculty advisors to minority pre-professional organizations. We should also advocate for and become involved with efforts to recruit and accept racial/ethnic group students into graduate programs, and to recruit, retain and promote faculty of color to achieve greater diversity within the environment.

One major dilemma in exercising these recommendations, understandably, is that it is considered time-consuming and is not appreciated or rewarded sufficiently by academic administrators. Intriguingly, this is a dilemma frequently faced by Black and other visible racial/ethnic group faculty who may assume responsibility in all activities related to "minority" concerns. It is critical that we advocate that these activities be considered important and vital to the community and thusly rewarded by the administrating bodies.

Finally, I believe that until we can institute these practices into codes and standards, they will simply remain as ideas or strategies. It is therefore important that counseling psychologists set a precedent by advocating that these practices be instituted into

ethical codes and that journal editors mandate that contributors include sections relative to the benefit provided to the community.

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